

Oak Grove Elementary Students, Parents and Teachers Get Active With Walk to School Day

Issue

Situated in one of Lexington County's most pedestrian-friendly areas, Oak Grove Elementary is home to 485 students, 160 of whom live within a 10-minute walk to campus. "We are lucky to have a 1.5-mile stretch of sidewalk along Oak Drive immediately in front of the school," school nurse Jessica Porter said. "Despite these advantages, our crossing guard reported this fall that the number of regular walkers had fallen from approximately 40 to less than 10 since the year 2000."

- The South Carolina Nutrition Research Consortium reports that 20 percent of the state's children are overweight or obese (6 percent above the national average) and are at risk of developing medical problems that affect their present and future health including Type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, and high cholesterol.
- According to Trust for America's Health, the state spent an estimated \$256 per person in 2003 on medical-costs related to obesity, which was the 26th highest amount in the nation.

This "inactivity trend" is increasing throughout the state and is alarming given the link between lack of exercise and obesity.

Intervention

One way Oak Grove Elementary teachers and parents made sure children got more physical activity was taking part in October 2005's Walk to School Day, an event that encourages children and parents to get fit by walking to campus. The SC Department of Health and Environmental Control, the SC Coalition for Promoting Physical Fitness and the SC Governor's Council on Physical Fitness used less than one percent of South Carolina Preventive Health and Health Services Block Grant dollars to sign up 50,000 participants across the state for Walk to School Day.

This initiative is designed to make teachers and parents more aware of the importance of physical activity in their children's lives, the barriers that children face when walking to school, and ways to generate changes in their community to promote the ability to walk safely to school.

Incentives were provided to participating schools to help them put Walk to School Day into action. Incentives included stickers, parent and school postcards and posters.

Impact

This year, 100 S.C. schools including 48,000 walkers took part in Walk to School Day.

At Oak Grove, more than 240 students walked to school Oct. 5, the day of the event.

This was up from 100 walkers in 2004, the school's first year participating in the program.

Two articles about the event ran the week of Oct. 5 in *The State*, South Carolina's largest newspaper.

Oak Grove Elementary and its surrounding community are planning follow-up activities including:

- Sending out neighborhood walkability surveys;
- Issuing "License to Walk" ID tags to students who walk to school and review safety rules with their parents;
- Starting a "Wednesday Walking Club," which meets monthly; and
- Lobbying for a neighborhood bike trail.

"Our planning committee, which is part of our School Climate Committee, decided to focus...on achieving sustainable results, and so we're focusing on follow-up to the Walk to School Day event," Porter said.

These ongoing activities will help to carry on the momentum and excitement Walk to School Day generated and ensure Oak Grove community children and families take part in physical activity therefore reducing the state's obesity-related health and cost burdens.

Contact: Jay Daniels, MPH
Physical Activity Consultant
SC DHEC

1777 St. Julian Place
Columbia, SC 29204
803-545-4486 or danielje@dhec.sc.gov